

The Built Environment

The built environment refers to all the man made structures where we live, work, play, worship, and commute. It includes design and integrity of housing, land use, and urban planning. The built environment is especially important for the health and well being of children.

Children today experience many health problems directly related to the built environment. Communities have developed housing areas that lack sidewalks despite having increased auto traffic. Cul-de-sac suburbs discourage walking because children cannot walk around the block. There are fewer safe routes to walk to school, and children tend to stay indoors instead of playing outside. Since the 1970's, the prevalence of childhood obesity has tripled.

Asthma has also increased dramatically in recent years. Indoor air pollutants can trigger asthma. Because of increasing energy prices in the 1970s, buildings were made "tighter" with less ventilation to conserve energy. This had the unintended consequence of increasing the concentration of indoor air pollutants.

Your home and your community lay the foundation for your child's health. When weather permits, open the windows to increase natural ventilation and provide clean air in your home. Look for neighborhoods where children can walk to school, enjoy contact with nature, walk safely to a nearby park, and play outside in the evenings. An active lifestyle and clean indoor air will help keep your child healthy.

Resources* (accessed 9/23/05):

About Healthy Places, by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/about.htm>

The U.S. Green Building Council
<http://www.usgbc.org/>

Sustainability and the Built Environment, by the Environmental Protection Agency
<http://www.epa.gov/ospinter/Sustainability/builtenvironment.htm>

* If the addresses listed above are no longer valid, try searching the internet by the title of the document and/or author